

VZCZCXR06909
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2867 2501334
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 061334Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9257
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 002867

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR IZ
SUBJECT: ISCI MOUNTS PEACEFUL COUNTER-PROTEST AFTER
ANTI-CORRUPTION DEMONSTRATION

REF: BAGHDAD 2764

Classified By: Team Leader Brad Lynch for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(SBU) This is a Muthanna PRT reporting cable.

¶1. (S/REL MCFI) Summary: ISCI party leader Lateef al-Hassani led a group of 250 protesters in a peaceful September 3 march aimed at counterbalancing an anti-corruption protest led one week earlier by independent Provincial Council (PC) members. Banners claimed that Hakim Khazal Khashan (censured PC Integrity Committee Chairman and organizer of the first demonstration) had slandered religious leaders during his protest. Political activity is heating up in Muthanna, and the battle lines are forming between anti-corruption activists and the religious parties, particularly ISCI. End summary.

Point/Counterpoint

¶2. (SBU) In response to Sheikh Hakim Khazal Khashan's peaceful protest one week earlier (reftel), 250 ISCI supporters led by Lateef Hassan Abbas al-Hassani hit the streets of Samawah, taking their message to Muthanna's governor, an independent Shi'a politician. Lateef is the ISCI party leader in Muthanna and brother of the previous Muthanna governor, Muhammad Ali al-Hassani, who was assassinated on August 20, 2007.

Protester Demands

¶3. (SBU) Marching from the Islamic School to the governor's office, protesters carried banners proclaiming that the "Secular Person" (Hakim) had slandered religious figures such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani during his protest march one week earlier. Upon reaching the governor's office, Lateef delivered his group's demands which included a solution to the province's electrical power shortage and resolution of political conflicts between PC members. (Note: Lateef is expected to be ISCI's gubernatorial pick in the upcoming election.)

Comment: Political Battle Lines Forming

¶4. (S/REL MCFI) Once again, the people of Muthanna witnessed a peaceful demonstration in the provincial capital. As was the case the week prior, security officers were out in force as a warning to potential troublemakers. Based upon multiple source information, we believe claims that Hakim slandered religious figures are incorrect. Governor Marzook, speaking with the PRT leader, mused that these protests are nothing more than an internal squabble between PC members. While this is correct on one level, we also see the battle lines forming between secular anti-corruption forces and ISCI in the run-up to provincial elections. End comment.

CROCKER